

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

PRESCRIBED GRAZING

(acres)
CODE 528

DEFINITION

Managing the controlled harvest of vegetation with grazing animals.

PURPOSES

This practice may be applied as part of a conservation management system to accomplish one or more of the following purposes.

- Improve or maintain the health and vigor of plant communities.
- Improve or maintain quantity and quality of forage for livestock health and productivity.
- Improve or maintain water quality and quantity.
- Reduce accelerated soil erosion, and maintain or improve soil condition.
- Improve or maintain the quantity and quality of food and/or cover available for wildlife.
- Promote economic stability through grazing land sustainability.
- *Reduce the incidence of wildfires by using grazing and/or browsing animals to remove excessive fuel loads.*

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies to all lands where grazing animals are managed.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable for all Purposes

Removal of herbage will be in accordance with site production limitations, rate of plant growth, and physiological needs of forage plants.

Manage kind of animal, animal number, grazing distribution, length of grazing periods, and timing of use to provide sufficient deferment from grazing during the *major plant* growing period.

Protect soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources when locating livestock feeding, handling, and watering facilities.

Manage grazing animals to maintain adequate vegetative cover on sensitive areas (i.e. riparian, wetland, habitats of concern, karst areas).

Additional Criteria to Improve or Maintain the Health and Vigor of Plant Communities

Duration and intensity of grazing will be based on desired plant health and expected productivity of key forage species to meet management unit objectives.

Adjust grazing rest periods and/or stocking rates to meet the desired objectives for the plant communities and the associated resources, including the grazing animal.

Schedule livestock movements based on rate of plant growth, available forage, and

utilization not calendar dates.

Periodic rest from grazing may be needed to maintain or restore the desired plant community. This may include rest and establishment periods after natural disasters, such as wildfires or severe drought.

Rest from grazing for a period of time may also be needed for ensuring the success of prescribed burning, brush control, seeding or other conservation practices applied to affect changes in the composition of the plant community.

Adjust grazing intensity, duration, timing, and location for short periods to take advantage of seasonal forages and crop aftermath, for weed control, initiate growth of component forages, condition a grazing management unit for higher quality grazing in the future, or prepare land for overseeding or reseeding or reduce wildfire fuel loads.

Grazing should be scheduled to allow periods for seed production, plant reproduction, and establishment.

Additional Criteria to Improve or Maintain Quantity and Quality of Forage for Livestock Health and Productivity

Plan grazing to match forage quantity and quality with goals of the livestock producer.

Additional Criteria to Improve or Maintain Water Quality and Quantity

Reduce time spent by animals in the riparian buffer area or other sensitive areas (i.e., off-stream placement of mineral and feeding facilities or water sources).

Maintain adequate ground cover and plant density to maintain or improve filtering capacity of the vegetation.

Minimize concentrated livestock areas to enhance nutrient distribution and improve or maintain ground cover.

Additional Criteria for Soil Erosion and Condition

Maintain adequate ground cover, litter, and canopy to maintain or improve infiltration and soil condition.

Maintain or enhance vegetation on streambanks, shorelines, or other sensitive areas.

Minimize concentrated livestock areas, trailing, and trampling to reduce soil compaction, excess runoff and erosion.

Additional Criteria to Improve or Maintain Food and/or Cover for Wildlife Species of Concern

Manage for diverse plant communities. Manage plant height, structure and density for desired wildlife habitat.

Provide rest from grazing during critical nesting periods.

Additional Criteria to Promote Economic Stability through Grazing Land Sustainability

Evaluate economics of the forage system and associated infrastructure.

Develop a grazing system that provides forage for as much of the year as possible to minimize supplemental feed cost.

Develop a contingency plan to ensure resource management and economic feasibility without resource degradation.

Reduce the loss of livestock from toxic and poisonous plants.

CONSIDERATIONS

Utilization or stubble height target levels are tools that can be used in conjunction with monitoring to help ensure that resource conservation and producer objectives are met.

When needed, rest areas for a period of time to ensure the success of prescribed fire, brush control, seeding or other conservation practices.

The hydrology of the management unit should be considered when planning prescribed grazing.

Where practical, start the grazing sequence in a different management unit each growing season.

When weeds are a significant problem prescribed grazing should be implemented in conjunction with pest management to protect desired plant communities.

Livestock feeding, handling, and watering facilities will be designed and installed in a manner to improve and/or maintain animal health and performance. These facilities will also be designed and installed to minimize stress, the spread of disease, parasites, contact with harmful organisms and toxic plants.

Supplemental feed and/or mineral requirements should be balanced with the forage consumption to meet the desired nutritional level for the kind and class of grazing livestock.

Animal husbandry requirements that may affect the design of the grazing prescription will be considered (i.e., frequent use of working facilities or multiple herds in rotation).

Where livestock are exposed to cold, wet conditions, windbreaks will reduce animal stress.

Prescribed grazing should consider the needs of other enterprises utilizing the same land, such as wildlife and recreational uses.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

The prescribed grazing plan shall conform to all applicable federal, state, and local laws. Seek measures to avoid adverse affects to *rare*, endangered, threatened, and candidate species and their habitats.

Prepare a prescribed grazing plan for all management units where grazing will occur according to state standards and specifications.

Guidelines for developing a prescribed grazing plan include:

1. Goals and Objectives clearly stated.
2. Resource Inventory (i.e. Resource condition, existing structures, facilities, soil, etc.)
3. Forage Inventory of the expected forage quality, quantity and species of forage in each *grazing* management unit(s) during the grazing period.
4. Forage-Animal Balance developed as a sustainable grazing plan for the management unit(s), which insure forage produced or available meets forage demand of livestock and/or wildlife of concern.
5. Grazing Plan developed for livestock that identifies periods of grazing, resting, and other treatment activities for each *grazing* management unit(s).
6. Contingency plan developed that details potential problems (i.e., severe drought, flooding) and serves as a guide for adjusting the grazing prescription to ensure resource management and economic feasibility without resource degradation. *This will include*

contingency plans to evacuate or de-stock all grazing management units except a sacrifice lot in order to minimize damage to the greater grazing resource.

7. Monitoring plan developed with appropriate records to assess whether the grazing strategy is meeting objectives. Identify the key areas and key plants that the manager should evaluate in making grazing management decisions.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Operation

Prescribed Grazing will be applied on a continuing basis throughout the occupation period of *any and all grazing management units*.

Adjustments will be made as needed to ensure that the goals and objectives of the prescribed grazing strategy are met.

Maintenance

All facilitating practices (i.e. Fence, Watering Facilities, Pest Management) that are needed to effect adequate grazing distribution as planned by this practice standard will be maintained in good working order.

REFERENCES

USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service. 1997. *National Range and Pasture Handbook*. Grazing Lands Technology Institute.